

INTERVIEWEE: KAY & DOLLY OLESEN

INTERVIEWER: Patricia Young

SUBJECT:

DATE: 30 May 1980

TRANSCRIBER: Linda A. Jantzen

PY: This is an interview with Dolly and Kay Olesen for the Historical Society of Palm Desert Oral History Project on Friday, May 30, 1980, at ten-thirty in the morning at their home on Pinion in Palm Desert.

Let's start first this morning by talking about why you came to Palm Desert, when it was, actually Palm Village, and what brought you here.

KO: Well, during the war we were in Los Angeles in the aircraft business for four years. Previous to that we had been in Portland. Both of us went to all our education in Oregon, high school, college. So we moved to Los Angeles in 1941 to be in the aircraft business manufacturing parts for all the prime aircraft contractors. When the war was over, we had to make a choice of going back to the northwest, Portland, or staying in California.



We were helped in making our decision because our son Garry . . .

DO: Had bronchial trouble.

KO: Had bronchial trouble, and they, the doctor advised us that it would be best for us to stay in a dry climate, California would be very fine. So they suggested that we not go back to Portland. In the meantime we had sold a lot of our interests in Portland, so it wasn't too difficult for us to stay. We chose the desert because of the dry climate. And we spent several long weekends during the war time in the Palm Springs area and liked it very well. And had met a lot of people. And so we decided also to go in business in this area because during the war we dealt with Chrysler Corporation and they several openings for dealerships in Santa Paula and down in the San Diego area, Santa Barbara, and also in the desert, Indio and Palm Springs. So we chose this area and moved in 1945, Halloween day. We moved and arrived in Indio. At the time there was, Indio was only about a population of about four hundred and fifty. However, it was confined to a very small area. Since then they've expanded and so it's not really a true population. Palm Desert was very, very few people. I



suppose forty-five or fifty. At that time they called it Palm Village. We, the housing was very critical. There was none. We rented a large motel, one-bedroom motel, about three miles this side of, I should say westerly of Indio, on a year lease. Had to pay six months in advance to even get the motel.

DO: That's true.

KO: Oh, several businessmen in Indio settled in this little area because there was a swimming pool and we had the Ford dealer, Ben Cowland, and Lee Cameron had the Western Auto store, and there was five or six families that settled in this area. We were there about, I guess, nearly a year before we were able to build a, to rent a house in Palm Desert. We rented that through Bob Ellsworth who was the first realtor in this area, and that was from the Palm Village Land Company. At the time we moved out here, our swimming pool was a large reservoir which now has been filled, which is contiguous to the Biltmore Hotel. We used to, all the families in the area, the Keedys and the Eckerts and the Tuppers and Barrys, all of us would move up there at night.

DO: Anne Carpenter.

KO: Anne Carpenter.



DO: Earl Dagg.

KO: Yes. We would normally gather around there at four or five o'clock in the afternoon and go swimming, and then we'd have our picnic dinners and so forth. That was the only swimming pool in the area. Then we lived there for, until about 1950, and we moved to Palm Desert on Pinion Street, built a house. Of course, at the time, in the meantime, Shadow Mountain Club had started, originally started with only a swimming pool which was olympic size, big circle eight, which was a fine swimming pool. Then they built the clubhouse and we were charter members of that club, Shadow Mountain Club. And we used to have dinners there every night. There would always be two hundred, three hundred, people there every night. It was really a going club, and really tied the whole community together. I think a little later on we started the Shadow Mountain Golf Club. Governor Walgren was one of the spearheads behind that, the ex-governor of Washington. And also he was a dollar a year man in Washington, D.C. under, I think Truman was president at that time.

PY: What's a dollar a year man?

KO: That's his salary in Washington.



DO: No salary.

KO: A group of us, I guess there was ten or twelve of us that started the Shadow Mountain Golf Club. I was the second, I guess the second president. Walgren was the first, and then he was killed in an automobile accident in Olympia, and I was vice president at the time and took over. But we planted most of the trees that are growing there today, and moved truckloads of rock and really got the golf course started. Today, why, it's really quite a nice family golf course. In the meantime, that's the social end of it, I think Shadow Mountain Country Club, then the golf course, was the most of the center of activity, not only for Palm Desert, both for Indio and the entire valley because it was a large meeting place and always had good food. We had to have a lot of fellowship out of the Shadow Mountain Club.

DO: You know, we were, our house was almost the last up the hill except for way up on what's now grapevine, was the house that built, and that was Oley Oleson of Oleson and Johnson. They don't even have the sign out there anymore, but that was there. And Oley's daughter used to go to high school with our daughter.

KO: As far as our children, they never used the streets.



They'd go right straight across country down to Palm Village.

DO: Catch the bus.

KO: To catch the bus. There were no streets here. No houses. They just went across country to catch the bus. As far as the business was concerned, I was fresh in getting this franchise in Indio for Chrysler Corporation, for Dodge-Plymouth and Imperial. And then we expanded a few years later to Palm Springs. Both facilities in both areas. And we were the first Chrysler dealer in the Coachella Valley. Of course, as the population has grown, so has our business in numbers of cars we sold. And at the time in Indio there was a Ford dealer that was struggling along. He also sold tractors, and a Chevrolet dealer. And ourselves was the only three agencies in Indio at the time. Of course, it's grown now so every American<sup>car</sup>/~~is~~ represented and all the foreign cars. However, the population now, of course, has grown in Indio to about eighteen thousand, and about the same in Palm Desert. And Palm Springs was also exploded. So that's about all I've done in the, well, I should say, I guess, that in 1950 we started, I was charter member of the Coachella Valley Savings and



Loan. We started that in Indio and Palm Springs. And eleven of us started that organization with very limited capital. Today we have branches in Desert Hot Springs, El Centro, Rancho Mirage, and of course Indio and Palm Springs, five stores. And our assets now has grown to two hundred and sixty million. And I've been chairman of the board for several years. We have, we were probably the first financial institution in the Coachella Valley to loan money to developers and real estate people even to buy land and then develop houses on it. The housing situation was so critical that, and the banks would not loan any money. We were the first savings and loan and we really opened it up for realtors like Ted Smith and Hal Capp and Dick Kaufman; Ed Welcome was here at the time, too. Those people really, it was really a godsend to them to get somebody to finance their land developments and housing. And it really has opened up the valley so we could get some housing.

PY: Is that why the group started it?

KO: Yes, that's the reason it was started. We dealt mainly in just loaning to build houses. We also, I was in the original group that started the first bank, really the second bank, Bank of America was already here, we started



a bank called the Desert Bank in Cathedral City. Then we started a bank in Palm Springs and one in Indio. We, and Mr.                      was president. He was formerly from Alaska. He moved down here because it was too cold in Alaska, and he wanted to retire in a warm country. And we had nine directors. And we had three nice old banks. And we finally merged that with the Riverside-San Bernardino Bank, which was called Citizens at the time. And they probably had twenty-five to thirty banks. And then about a year later they merged with Security Pacific Bank, which, of course, is well represented in this area and one of the larger banks. They also went into, it opened up the banks some for loaning to build houses when the savings and loans started coming in here. Outside of that, I've always been in some ranching, citrus and dates, started to ranch in the Oasis area twenty-four years ago, and just sold it in December. But I've had several ranches and sold them, and I was raised on a ranch and I kind of had a warm spot for farming. That's about all I could think of right at the minute.

PY: Why did you chose not to ranch in this area?

KO: Mainly because the Coachella Valley County Water District



doesn't extend its operation this far. It comes out about three miles west, easterly, westerly of Indio, and that goes down the Oasis area. And also the warmer parts of the valley is in the Mecca area and the Oasis area. Around La Quinta and that area is much cooler, and you do get some frost for citrus. We were mostly in citrus. But this area here is, dates have been farmed in this area. Grapes, some grapes, but this hasn't been too successful. Most of the grapes are gone now. But the dates can thrive in this area. However, the development of golf courses and housing, the dates are fast leaving our area and new plantings are going in the low valley.

DO: Hate to see the beauty of those date trees, don't you, all the groves being taken out?

KO: Yes.

PY: Well, when you moved to this area, it must have looked like kind of an agricultural paradise in some of that area.

DO: Yes.

KO: Well, this street that we move on . . .

DO: We moved down where the new development is being down there. Forget the name. Moran was it?



PY: Yes.

KO: Yes, Ronny Moran, the Cadillac dealer.

DO: That was a beautiful ranch. And Cavanagh's ranch, too, you know.

KO: That was eighty acres of beautiful dates. Now that's a rising golf course that's just being developed. This street that we live on right here, Pinion Street, we used to land airplanes on that street. So you see that there was not too many people here at the time.

PY: Grace Hume mentioned that. She didn't say where it was; she just said they used to land on the south side.

KO: Yes.

DO: Yes.

PY: And then they would come over for breakfast.

DO: Right here

PY: When they had the Palm Village Inn.

KO: Yes.

DO: Yes, that's Grace Hume. Where does she live now?

PY: Same place.

DO: Does she?

PY: She hasn't moved.

DO: She's like we are.

KO: Yes.

DO: We keep saying we're going into a condominium, and our



son bought one last year for us while we were gone.

We went to New Zealand, and our number came up at Ironwood, and so he selected a site for us. And we built it. Then we just couldn't bring ourselves to move in, so we sold it. Still here.

KO: I don't know what else you want to know. I mean, that pretty much covers it. I might, well, I might go to, I want something out of it                      When the area started to grow, we didn't have any fire department at the time. The Riverside County could expend a certain amount of money for a fire station. The fire station that they're in at the present time at El Paseo cost about fourteen thousand dollars. The material was purchased and then the county hired brick masons to put the walls up. And that installation was around fourteen thousand dollars. That was our fire station. I think Bob Keedy was the first chief, and I was captain. And we had about from ten to fifteen volunteer firemen, one paid fireman from the fire department or from the county. And he was called into service many times because of, he was a paramedic and could help in cases of heart attacks and so forth to get them to a doctor, to get a patient to the doctor. The equipment was wherever the



original fire station. We bought a fire engine surplus and it ran about, I think, around five or six hundred dollars for this fire engine. That was our first piece of equipment. Then the county came in with another piece of equipment. We used to have benefits at the Shadow Mountain Club. I remember one of them . . .

DO: I remember Oley Oleson

KO: Very distinctly.

DO: And brought his troop down for one.

KO: He had his preview before he went on the show with . . .

DO: I don't know if we charged.

KO: With Hells A Poppin. And they put on the whole show.

It lasted about three hours. They started shooting pistols at Rancho Mirage and Indian Wells and they all gathered there and then put on the show Hell's A Poppin, which was a three-hour show. And we raised about seven thousand dollars at that show.

DO: That was for the benefit of the fire department.

KO: That's really where . . .

DO: It was a wonderful

KO: We got our first start for helmets and out for equipment we needed for the fire department. So, of course, down the road the county has helped, and we've had several



benefits and donations. We do have a nice fire department at the present time. However, it's grown and they do need a larger fire department and another location, a second location. But we had a lot of fun. We met every Monday night. We'd go through our drills and we'd usually end up with a poker game and a little beer. We used to have a lot of fun. We'd have old buildings around we wanted to get rid of and we'd have somebody set those on fire on Monday nights so we could have practice going out and putting the fires out. Our record was not too good. We had a hundred percent record for the first five fires. We didn't save a one of them; they burnt to the ground. (chuckle) The first one we saved was Desert Air fire.

DO: Put out the one at the college.

KO: Was Desert Air fire

DO: They saved the house of the president of the college.

KO: That was later, but the one they really saved was the Desert Air, and it happened about two o'clock in the morning. And it was in December, and it was cold. Hank Gogerty, he operated that with the airport. So we put the fire out. I think we had damaged the two or three buildings, but we were really successful and put the fire



out. And then I think it was four o'clock in the morning, and, of course, he opened the bar and that helped, too, you know. Had to stay around to make sure the fire was out. I think the next one we saved was Dr. McCall's. He was president of the College of the Desert. And it happened on an Easter Sunday and some of the firemen were real good church people and they were ready to go to church. They had their church clothes on. One of them was Bob Keedy. And this fire started in the furnace in the carport. Apparently, the air conditioning and the furnace was in one unit. It had been warmed and then he changed it over to the furnace and some way or another it caught on fire, and this fire went right up to the flu to the second floor. So Bob Keedy was one of the first ones down there and he was holding the hose with his Sunday Easter clothes on fighting this fire, and the water was going up and coming right back on him. So we got up to the second floor, and that was before Dr. McCall moved in. I forget the . . .

DO: Amos.

KO: He was the one that owned the property. They sold it.

DO: O'Dell?

KO: O'Dell, yes.



DO: O'Dell.

KO: Oh, yes. But, of course, like all good firemen, and I told him, I said, now the only way we're going to do this, we're going to have to take axes and go up the second floor, knock a hole in the wall, and get the water running down. And O'Dell said, no, you can't do that; you can't tear up her house. I said, well, I said, we can just let her burn then, I guess. Says, oh, go ahead. So we went up to the second floor and knocked a hole in the wall and got the hose up there and put the fire out and saved the house. But we've had some . . .

DO: That was a good one to save, too; that's a lovely home out there.

KO: Was a lovely home, yes. So those were the days was normally we'd have a fire, you know, we'd only have five or six or seven people, you know, to manage everything. And the fire equipment was very difficult. We built it up to around twenty, and so then we started saving some houses. But we did save a lot of lives with the oxygen equipment and so forth, which was all purchased through the different benefits and donations. So I think that's about covers it, the main things I can think of.



PY: What are the changes that have made the volunteer aspect of the fire department not as interesting, I guess, or less significant now as opposed to what it was?

KO: Well, I think in those days we didn't have any television, not very good radio programs. Actually, we really didn't have too much to do. We had to really make our own entertainment at that time. We'd have, we had a few softball teams. Not too many. And I mean the Rotary Clubs would have ball games between each other. We just didn't have too much activity, so it was kind of a half social event, too. Now everybody is busy. I mean you got television, you got football, basketball. All the young people are, they're real busy. So I think. I don't know how large the fire department is today, but I think it's a pretty good volunteer fire department. And they have several paid, county-paid employees on the fire department. I might cover a little bit on the recreation department, too.

DO: Of course, that was started in Indio.

KO: Yes, but it covered the entire valley.

DO: Yes.

KO: At the time we used to try to help the kids, keep them off the streets at night, so we started a baseball



league in the summer in about 1947. And we called it the Coachella Valley Recreation District.

DO: You had the Dodger team before.

KO: We called it the Sports League, is what we called it.

DO: Sports league.

KO: And we were very fortunate. We got twenty-five people from all over the valley, Palm Desert, Indian Wells, Indio, Coachella, Thermal, Mecca, twenty-five men to help put this thing together. There was no baseball teams in the valley at all. And then we got different companies to sponsor a team. Imperial Motors sponsored the Dodgers, which is the first softball team in Coachella Valley. And then we were able to get a team in Coachella, one in Thermal, one in Mecca, and five in Indio. We had eight teams. That was the first league in 1947. We went on then, and those kids were in the high school age, from about thirteen to eighteen. Then we started other leagues, smaller kids starting at eight. Then we started the girls' league. We'd raise about fifteen to twenty thousand dollars by volunteer selling pop and various money-raising to finance so we could buy baseballs and so forth. All the sponsors had to buy their uniforms and the mitts and et cetera for



their own ball clubs. About nineteen, I think it was fifty or fifty-one, we got it on the tax roll for the Coachella Valley on ten cents a hundred. And that way we raised, I think we started them about forty, fifty, sixty thousand. That way we were able to help to buy baseballs and pay for umpires and so forth. That built up to about three hundred thousand dollars, even on a very minimal of ten cents a hundred tax which is really nothing. I was in that, we called that the Coachella Valley Parkway and Recreation District. I was in that twenty-five years, president for several of the last years. That was grown into quite an organization. Now today they have around eighty teams. They have arts and crafts throughout the whole valley. And they have wrestling and tennis and swimming and run all the swimming pools. At that time there were no swimming pools. Since they built two in Indio, one in Mecca, one in Thermal and one in Coachella. And then, of course, they use the one here at College of the Desert. So, and also we purchased the recreation building over here on seventy-four, five acres that used to be the players theatre. That was in a trust and we were able to purchase that at a very reasonable price. It now belongs to the



recreation district. I imagine some day they'll probably give it to the city of Palm Desert. They, and also we were able to obtain about thirty additional acres from Ahmanson surrounding this location. And now they're putting in tennis courts and playground areas and picnic areas in that particular spot. So some day that will be a nice park.

PY: Where will this be

KO: It's off of seventy-four where the old playhouse is.

PY: Oh, that area will be a park.

DO: You know where the

KO: They got additional, I was able to get an additional thirty acres from Ahmanson. He gave it as a gift. And, of course, during this time we had a real problem for baseball parks. And we kept getting the cities to build them, and we would help install the lights and et cetera. But it's been real good, you know, to take care of eighty teams. You need a lot of baseball parks. We're able to use, of course, the school facilities, their ball parks. And we built several ourselves in the La Quinta area and Thermal and back into Indio. But that's been a fine recreation program. Proposition 13 did hurt recreation throughout the state, and it's



curtailed, and I think the people have had to get together and put some money into help the program the last year or two.

PY: Was it including Palm Springs?

KO: It goes as far as Rancho Mirage. It's the Coachella Valley High School, Unified High School District, same area. Yes. And it goes clear to Eagle Mountain. Yes.

PY: I often forget that we include all the way up in there.

KO: Yes. It's quite a ways. I think they're deleting that, though, now, really, because they've got their own school. I think that has been deleted. Yes. But at the time it did include that, see. I can't think of anything else.

PY: Can you talk perhaps a little bit about your neighbors in Palm Village and what it was like living there? Actually, let me ask this first. Did you move there because these other car dealers were living there at the time? Is that what you were saying?

KO: No, it was just a matter of finding a place to live, really.

DO: No, we really selected Palm Desert because we really wanted to be out in the country, not to live in the city of Indio. And, of course, it was so small here. We



wouldn't have thought it would grow like this. We wanted to be alone, I guess. (chuckle)

KO: Well, also we had business in Palm Springs so it was halfway between; it was pretty good.

DO: This did make it nice to live in Palm Desert and be twelve miles each way, you know.

KO: The only place to eat between Indio and Cathedral City or any kind of refreshments was Angelo's, which is the building now they're tearing down the old Sunshine. That was the only restaurant between Indio and Cathedral City. Angelo operated that for several years. At one time it belonged to, before Angelo got it, it belonged to Doc Gurley who was a Chevrolet dealer here for years. That used to be our gathering places when we'd get together in the evenings for baseball games and so forth.

DO: He was always awfully good to everybody here, too.

KO: Very good.

PY: Was it a family restaurant or was it

KO: It was a family restaurant, yes.

DO: He and his wife had it. I remember I used to be on the board of the election, and we'd meet in Hal Capp's office right across the street there.

KO: Hal Capp's Invitational.



DO: He let us use that. I remember when Eisenhower was elected. But we only had one board and we worked from seven in the morning until we got through counting. And he waved goodbye to me going hunting at three in the morning as we were still counting. That was the year Eisenhower was elected.

KO: Elected. But Angelo came over . . .

DO: And Angelo just came over, brought our dinners over to us, and kept us in coffee all day and all night.

KO: He's really a wonderful person, yes. Didn't have one hair on his head, totally bald-headed. But he was a character in the area, and that was really our only social club really or to meet besides the Shadow Mountain.

PY: And then Tony Pachella.

KO: Tony was his partner.

DO: He was his partner in that.

KO: Yes, I think not at first, but later Tony was his partner, yes. Yes.

DO: Now that was later he came there.

KO: Yes.

PY: So would families gather there as well as just . . .

DO: Oh, no, just for dinners was all. It was our eating place here.



KO: Yes.

PY: It was apparently the dinner place.

KO: Was an adult place, yes, it was not really a . . .

DO: Oh, yes.

KO: Yes, yes. It was also a bar, you know, so . . . But all the, there was very few people in this, on the south side of a hundred and eleven. They were all in that area down there.

PY: Someone was on the south side though?

KO: There was very few over here.

PY: Do you remember who was here?

DO: Well, the Desert Magazine.

KO: It started in about forty, about fifty, I think. Well, when we moved up here the only person on the street was the Walgreens across the street and down the street on this side.

DO: In fifty-one.

KO: In fifty-one, was Cliff Henderson.

DO: Cliff Henderson and then the Bears.

KO: And the Bears across the street.

DO: Lived over here and passed away.

KO: Only four houses on this street. We were the fourth house on the street.



PY: Well, when you moved to                      forty-five or when  
you actually moved out to Palm Village.

KO: Yes.

DO: There were no houses over there.

KO: No houses here at all. This was just all bare.

Apparently, during the war this was used by Patton for  
his motorized headquarters. He put in the streets and  
the water system. And then Cliff Henderson and his  
group picked it up and started Palm Desert.

PY: So the only building that was here after, besides what  
Patton left, was the Wilson homestead then on seventy-  
four?

KO: I think that was about it, yes. Yes.

PY: That little building, you know, I can't remember your  
gate now.

KO: Yes.

DO: Oh, yes.

KO: The adobe, yes.

DO: Yes.

KO: Yes, that's right. Then Randall Henderson, Cliff's  
brother, built the Desert Magazine building. And he  
really was . . .

DO: Well, that was here earlier.



KO: Yes, his books says he was the founder of Palm Desert. Not Cliff; they're brothers, see. But I think it was pretty close. I think both of them found Palm Desert really. Yes. They both have done a lot of good, donating land and money and so forth, you know.

DO: Have you talked to Seria Henderson?

KO: She told you that then, too, didn't she? Or did she mention that?

PY: Not really.

KO: Yes. In his book, it brings it out pretty plainly, Randall's book. Have you read that?

PY: I've read Desert Editor, and then I've also read Down His Trail.

DO: Now you know what we . . .

KO: Yes.

PY: Desert Trail. What about some of your neighbors in Palm Village? What was it like when you first moved there?

DO: Well, just a little community, all friends. You knew everyone that lived there. There was hardly a soul you didn't know. We could say we all gathered there at the swimming pool at four o'clock and took our children up and . . .

PY: Was it a more relaxed atmosphere?



DO: Very quiet life, which was why we wanted to live out here was for the . . .

KO: Another neighbor there we didn't mention was Bill Car.

DO: I think Bill Car lived across the street from us.

KO: Yes.

DO: He was the petroleum . . .

KO: Signal Oil dealer at the time. Yes. He lived in Indio. His business was in Indio.

DO: But he's one of the first . . .

KO: What is the fellow's name that retired from Packard, the designer at Packard Automobile?

DO: Oh, yes. Lived right behind us.

KO: They're both gone now. And then, of course, the one that the baseball field's name for in Indio that died, real estate man. Can't even think of his name.

PY: Here, let me move that out of the way so you can stretch.

KO: No, that's fine. No, that's okay.

DO: Anne Carpenter used to have a little cocker spaniel just like we did. Chipper was born in 1947. (chuckle) And they used to just run away, both of them. You never knew which . . . They were friends practically, and you never knew which one you were finding when you picked one up.



PY: What was it like for children growing up here? I mean once Palm Desert had started to develop, were there many children or was it really a retired community?

DO: No. Our two children here were two of the few.

KO: Keedys.

DO: Well, they had little tiny ones, but ours were school age. And I know we used to, when they went to Coachella, well, Karen went to Roosevelt School down in, and they both did at first; down in Indio they had to take the bus down there to school. And then Karen was in high school at Coachella, and Gary was in the first class of the Palm Desert School. He graduated with fifteen in his class. Then he had to go to Coachella then to high school. But they had to go seventeen miles to the high school on the bus. An hour each way every day. They used to run down here to catch the bus. The buses didn't come up here like they do now. They had to walk down there and catch the bus or else I'd have to take them, one or the other. Usually they walked. Did them good. (chuckle)

PY: So did they have many playmates in this area?

DO: No, not very many. And they used to swim over at the Shadow Mountain Club a lot, and that was kind of a



gathering place around the pool over there. Most everyone around here belonged to the Shadow Mountain Club.

So they all used that pool and recreation facilities over there. It was wonderful for the children.

PY: Was it hard on them, do you think, because there were so few?

DO: Oh, I don't think so. No, it was a little harder on us because when they'd have things in the high school in the evening, we'd have all those miles to drive to take them and bring them home. We'd kind of worry about them a little bit. But I don't think they suffered for it at all. They entered into everything.

PY: What was the makeup of the community here in the early days? Was it mainly seasonal or was it people who were retiring here permanently or

DO: Mostly, it wasn't seasonal too much then. We residents who were business people made up most of it.

PY: Then why did the small business community right here close down in the summer?

DO: Well, this was later, of course, after Palm Desert started. I'm speaking of when we went to Palm Village. They were just local people, and no seasonal people.

KO: All in business.



DO: They were all business people or retired like the Ellsworth, he was retired for disability from the . . .

KO: Service.

DO: Yes, Air Force. And so he came here for his health, too. He had been shot in the lungs during the war, and so he went into real estate here. But people didn't leave very much. I know, we thought actually when we moved down here that we would have, leave all summer, but it wasn't possible. We'd have to keep our business open. Travel that came through and needed the service. You just couldn't close your place. We were lucky to get a month off. And we'd always go back home to Portland and the northwest for a month. But it was hard to do.

KO: Our air conditioning at the time was not the best in the world either, you know. They've made vast improvements

DO: Water coolers. (chuckle)

KO: First we only had water coolers, and the electrical air conditioner, of course, came along which helped a lot. A little bit sticky.

DO: We'd have to be wet enough.

KO: We had to use the swimming pools.



DO: It was when Palm Desert opened up that winter people bought here again. That's when you're thinking of the businesses closing up in the summer.

PY: I don't think there was much here, was there, when there was just Palm Village

DO: No, there weren't many

KO: Had one little grocery store, Keedy's Grocery Store. That's all. No hardware store, no nothing.

DO: Keedys had a grocery store on that side. Then, of course, when this opened up, why then Mullens came in and built his, he opened the first drugstore.

KO: Have you talked to Ed Mullens?

PY: Oh, he's another one of those people who keep saying tomorrow.

KO: Yes.

DO: Oh, he'd be very interesting because . . .

KO: Yes.

DO: Because he began with the drugstore in Palm Desert here, not Palm Village.

KO: With a drugstore you knew everybody, you know. I might also say that I've been on the Riverside County Commission for twenty-two years, and we were the first one to put a master plan in this whole area. Zoning



for various things and, of course, most of the decisions were made in this area before it became a city. Was in the hands of the, I did the planning and the supervisors was the one that put the final okay on it. Like the zoning up in Ironwood. That was the breakthrough for the sewer line that goes to Cook Road. We okayed the sewer line, the sewer facilities, the forty acres on Cook. If it hadn't been for the development in Ironwood, we probably wouldn't have sewers in this area today because Ironwood paid for the main line from Ironwood clear to Cook Street for the main sewer lines. And, of course, now there's several others have tied into it, including Eisenhower Hospital and the whole area. We're also instrumental in the road from Portola to Highway 74 homestead. That was a breakthrough for that road. We had to fight to get that for two or three years.

PY: When you say we had to fight . . .

KO: Well, we got the people in the area to help. I did, see.

DO: You had to clear, I mean the county, don't you?

KO: It had to clear through the county. It was all county then, see. And we got local people such as Hal Capp and Ted Smith and mostly real estate people to get the road through, see. But . . .



PY: Were you fighting as a county planning commission to get this?

KO: To get the additional facilities for this area, see. But we had to first, we completed the first master plan for the whole valley including Palm Desert. All the zoning and everything. Since it become a city they've taken our zoning and worked it over. It's practically the same really as it has been for years.

PY: What was foreseen for this area in terms of planning and zoning?

KO: Do what?

PY: What was foreseen, I mean twenty-two years ago when you started planning the zoning in this area?

KO: Well, we for example, the lots up above us here, most of those were R-1 twelve thousand or R-1 fifteen thousand. The city of Palm Desert have cut them down now to eight, nine, ten thousand. In other words, more density, see. We thought this area up in here should be the . . .

SIDE 2:

KO: Would be the garden spot of the whole area so we wanted to dig lots up there so to build nice homes. But they've cut it back quite a little.



PY: Is that up by Silver Spur, is that where you mean?

KO: It's below Silver Spur. This kind of homestead.

PY: Marrakesh area.

KO: Yes. Between Marrakesh and Silver Spur, that area.

And then over on seventy-four where the Lewis homes are putting those, and I think the lots now are about eight or nine thousand square foot. They were all twelve and fifteen. But generally the zoning has remained about the same really. It's changed some, but politics will change it, you know. But . . .

PY: How had they zoned the north side of one eleven?

KO: The north side was zoned for more or less for affordable housing and for service people and smaller homes. Those lots were seventy-two hundred square foot up to about eight thousand. And some of it, of course, was zoned for apartments for the college, on Monterey and then that area down in there was set aside for, on Portola, for mobile homes, too. And that's where the mobile homes have really concentrated. The other was up, way above on seventy-four. Those two spots the only place we allowed for mobile homes originally. There were several others, locations that they tried to get mobile homes, but we've kept them out over the years. And the city has done the same thing. That was setup by the



county many years ago.

PY: What were the original sizes of the lots on the Palm Village?

KO: Palm Village? They were seventy-two hundred eight thousand, you know. I don't think there's anything smaller than seventy-two hundred unless they've changed them since they've become a city. The same with, we zoned everything and like in the Springs and Sunrise Country Club, Monterey. Even Las Palmas. All of those were zoned by the county before they become a city.

DO: Did you have the zoning before we ever moved here in forty-five?

KO: Oh, yes.

DO: County had zoning there?

KO: No, this plan was put in in the fifties.

DO: I was thinking that.

KO: Yes, and then it was modified. And the last time it was modified I think was 1965 or sixty-

PY: So when Palm Village was developed, there literally was no plan at all.

KO: Yes, there was a county plan. Oh, it was all zoned, everything was all zoned.

PY: When Palm Village went in in the forties?



KO: Yes, it was zoned. Yes.

DO: That was, of course, before he was on the commission.

KO: But that was one, probably one of the first subdivisions in the whole area. The Gillettes owned that That was Gillette Razor Blades. But that was all zoned for lots, small lots, seventy-two hundred, yes. That was all zoned. And the streets were in, yes. So that went in, probably in the forties, early forties. Yes. One of the older county subdivisions. But I would say that there hasn't been too much changes since Palm Desert become a city on the zoning.

PY: How about Indian Wells?

KO: Indian Wells, they, I would say has remained practically the same. Even the new area now that's the Cove Golf Course was zoned many years ago by the county, and it hasn't changed too much either.

PY: Even though originally that whole area was commercial down there on the frontage of the highway.

KO: In Indian Wells?

PY: Yes.

KO: No, there was . . .

PY: Where they put in a cove, you know where they had the little store and . . .



KO: Well, there was just that one little area, that little mobile home park and the grocery store. That's the only commercial that was in there. Yes. We zoned the mobile home park. I think the grocery store had been there so long that I think it was probably not commercial. I think it was just nonconforming. But we did zone the park, the little mobile home park. And there was very little, there was no commercial along a hundred and eleven. From Orson Street on in there was some commercial, towards Indio.

PY: You mean the date gardens and . . .

KO: Yes. That was zoned. Shields and those in there were all zoned.

DO: Would you like a cup of coffee?

PY: No, thanks. I'm doing quite fine. Tell me a little about Colonel Ellsworth.

KO: Colonel Ellsworth was a lieutenant colonel; what was his rank? We called him colonel.

DO: He was a colonel.

KO: He was discharged with honorable discharge because of injury during the war. Moved to the desert because he had to be in warm desert climate. And he was pretty well shot up with shrapnel and was in the hospital every



month or two draining his lungs and everything else.

DO: But he always lived in Palm Village. He never built over here.

KO: He always lived in Palm Village. He had to have something to do; the developers of the subdivision down there, Palm Village Company wanted, he was their only salesman. He went to work for them.

PY: When did he come to the area?

KO: He came there in about 1944-45. I think he was just a little ahead of us.

DO: About a year ahead of us.

KO: About a year ahead of us. We bought our lots down there, nine hundred dollars apiece. And that was for the better lots. There were some that were four or five hundred.

DO: They were a little larger.

KO: Yes. Big lots. But that was really the start. And he sold all the lots in Palm Village.

PY: Oh, so then the entire subdivision was sold out.

KO: Oh, yes, we were sold out, yes. A lot of people bought it to buy homes on later. And it took him about, I'd say, two years, something like that to sell them. Then he only had resale.



DO: He moved to Laguna Hills and bought one of their condominiums.

KO: Yes, but that was . . .

DO: A long time ago, though.

KO: Yes, that was . . .

DO: Eight or ten years ago, was it?

KO: Yes, about ten years ago. He still lives there.

DO: And we see them.

KO: See him in the summer.

DO: We see them every summer. Last year they had their fifty-fifth wedding anniversary. Big party at the schedule, and then they both got sick and they couldn't have it. And they haven't been well since. He's just lately has, he's in the hospital. But one or the other it seems like has been ill the last few years. But I play bridge with her every summer when I go down. They have a Palm Desert Bridge Club down there. People who decide they want, they can't have two homes and they have to decide whether they want to live here in the desert or at the beach, they, quite a few of them that I know have bought down there. And quite a few are widows who have moved down there. Sold their homes here. So they have this little bridge club down there,



and I always substitute in the summertime down there.

PY: That's great! See all your old friends.

DO: See all your old friends.

PY: Yes. you used to play bridge in Palm Village area.

DO: Oh, yes. We had a bridge club down in Palm Village.

Gertrude Keedy belonged and Mary Ellsworth and, oh,  
who . . . Mrs. Berry, I think, belonged to that.

Louise Slater, they had the Sage and Sun Motel there.

PY: Which became the Biltmore?

DO: No, the service station was built on there, and then  
the Biltmore, I think they tore the Sage and Sun down  
and built the filling station.

KO: That gas station that's closed right across from Keedys'.

DO: And I think Lorene Akert belonged to that little club,  
too.

KO: Yes, she did, yes. Yes, yes, yes.

DO: Oh, and then a little bit later when the desert adobe  
was built here

PY: Do you mean Adobe Gardens?

DO: The Adobe Motel.

PY: On seventy-four.

KO: Over where the R & D is now.

DO: The ones who started that were, we see them in Hawaii,  
Pat. She belonged. And Lorraine Vallet. You've



probably talked to her, haven't you? They still have their ranch, I think, out there. But that was our little bridge group down there.

PY: So it actually drew on more than just Palm Village.

DO: Yes. Well, later. It was started when this wasn't here, and then later Lorraine Peck belonged to it. But Lorraine Vallet was one of the first ones. And, of course, that was just a little ways away from there.

PY : When did the lifestyle start changing so that there were other, I mean people started getting busier as they are now or, was that a slow transition?

KO: I think it was fairly slow, yes. We really got our growth in the last three or four years really. It's exploded in the last three or four years.

PY: I mean in terms of having television and other things to do so that

DO: Well, we had television down there, didn't we?

KO: No, I don't think so.

DO: Thought we got our first television when we were down there.

KO: When we had the baseball teams back in the forty-seven, forty-eight, forty-nine and fifties we used to get for



baseball games, we'd get three or four or five hundred people. They had nothing else to do. They'd come out and watch the kids play ball. Normally for baseball games, you'd only get the proud parents and relatives. But we used to have three or four or five hundred people. In fact, we sold quite a few school buses and we had demonstrators, and I'd run these school buses to haul the people to different parks. Get drivers from my company to drive them, take them to the ball game, take them home, you know. They didn't have any entertainment in those days, you know. And the air conditioning was such that you couldn't sit in your house at night; you had to wait until it cooled off before you'd go to bed.

DO: I think we went to Palm Springs for diversion quite a lot in those days.

KO: I think that's a pretty good possibility.

DO: I remember the Ellsworth, and we used to go down for the square dancing one night a week, on Saturday night, I think, at the Biltmore Hotel in Palm Springs. And quite a group of us used to go down and do things like that, you know.



KO: Well, they had the, Shumann had his place in Palm Springs, the CheeChee.

DO: He owned the CheeChee and that old Palm House.

KO: Old Palm House, yes.

DO: But those were our nights out.

KO: Palm Springs, they were the social center really besides, only thing we really had out here was Shadow Mountain Club. And that was a going jetty for many years, I'll tell you that.

PY: What changed that, do you think?

KO: Well, I think other things developed, I mean more entertainment places started up, eating places and so forth. And this was the only place to eat out here at the time so we had to go there. And we always had good music. We had this little trio there every night, you know. And it was really a fun spot, but then I think . . .

DO: It was the social center here.

KO: And they got in a little politics with the management, too.

DO: Do you remember Monday night used to be a bad night at the club. All of us were always trying to help the club. And Hazel Sargent Snyder, she's not here anymore



but she's down at Laguna Hills, she's one of the ones that just moved down there a year ago. She used to . . .

KO: Queen for a night.

DO: Have a queen for a night or a party on a Monday night, and they just were packed because everybody, it was no longer the dull night. (chuckle) Monday night was it.

KO: They had all kinds of singing, ab lib singing, you know, from the crowd, and the merchants would give door prizes.

DO: I can't remember how we got the queen for a night.

KO: Square dancing and everything else. Yes, yes. But it was really a fun deal.

DO: I guess it was a drawing, wasn't it, for queen for a night? I guess that's what it was.

KO: Yes. And for the door prizes.

DO: Yes.

PY: Oh, it was like the old Jack Bailey Queen for a Day thing?

DO: Yes, that's what it, takeoff on that. And Hazel, her name in those days was Hazel Sargent, and she would MC it and she's quite a singer and sing for it. And she really spearheaded it.



KO: Yes.

DO: I wish she were here; you'd enjoy talking to her.

KO: I think the real change, though, was when you had more eating places, more places to go, and more population.

PY: More distraction from the central core?

KO: That's right. Yes.

PY: Hazel Sargent Snider?

KO: Yes.

PY: And she's in Laguna Hills?

DO: Laguna Hills now.

KO: Yes.

DO: They just moved away a year ago.

PY: Now is that the Leisure World area?

DO: That's Leisure World, yes.

KO: Yes.

DO: They love it down there.

PY: Who's her husband?

DO: Frank Snider.

PY: Frank Snider.

KO: He's past president of the Shadow Mountain Club, too, Shadow Mountain Golf Club.

PY: Okay. Oh, and you were telling me about June Alley was living down there as well.



DO: No, she lives here. June Alley.

PY: She told me she lives in Palm Village.

DO: Oh, yes, she lived in Palm Village, with her mother and father.

KO: Dr. Barry.

DO: She lost her husband, and she lived with her father, Dr. Barry, and Mrs. Barry. They were just a block from us down there, too. And right near Anne Carpenter.

KO: Anne Carpenter was next door, wasn't she?

DO: Yes, they're very good friends.

KO: Yes.

DO: Well, next door were the Ruggéys, Adele Ruggéy and Dr. Ruggéy.

KO: That's right, yes.

DO: Lived next door to the Barrys. Adele is still here. Have you talked to Adele? Well, Adele remarried, Dr. Ruggéy died and she married, her name is North now. And she lives down at Bramar. I'd forgotten about the Ruggéys.

KO: Yes.

DO: But they were there about that time, too.

KO: Yes.

PY: All these doctors, they were retired MD's?



KO: All retired MD's, yes.

PY: So if you needed someone, you actually did have someone who was

DO: Oh, yes, he was retired.

KO: Yes.

PY: So would they help or was there a doctor here?

DO: I don't think he was called on for help. He was quite elderly.

KO: Yes, Ruggey was quite elderly. Yes.

PY: How about Dr. Barry?

DO: No, and Dr. Barry was quite elderly, too.

KO: He was quite elderly, yes.

DO: And he was all retired.

KO: We had Dr. Morey. Dr. Morey lived right next door

DO: Yes, Dr. Morey lived just two doors from us here when we built this house.

PY: When he was home, you mean.

KO: Yes, that's right.

DO: So we did have Dr. Morey, and he was our doctor in those days.

KO: Yes. Only doctor we had.

DO: I think he was.

KO: Yes.



PY: Except summers, right. They left in the summer.

KO: Then when Dr. Seals came along.

DO: Yes, they used to leave in the summer.

KO: Dr. Seals came along, yes. That's what made it so important for the fire department. When somebody would have a heart attack and he had to get oxygen to them. Get the oxygen and get them to the hospital. We saved quite a few lives. Oxygen is kind of important when you have a heart attack.

PY: When did you actually start the fire department?

KO: Had to be in the fifties, didn't it, forty-seven, forty-eight?

DO: Before we moved up here.

KO: Yes.

DO: Don't you remember?

KO: Yes.

DO: Because

KO: I guess it was in forty-seven, forty-eight.

DO: You and Bill Carr and . . .

KO: Keedy.

DO: Doug Keedy and . . .

KO: Yes. I can't even remember

DO: Wasn't Doug Keedy; what's Keedy's first name?



PY: Bob.

DO: Bob Keedy.

KO: Bob Keedy, yes. The carpenter that used to be here, too, you remember. He lived down by the old players, what's his name, Callender, he moved away. Ruth Epp, Epp's husband was on it, too.

DO: We're thinking of people we haven't thought about for years and year.

KO: Yes.

PY: That's what these interviews do. (chuckle)

KO: The fellow next door to us that was in the Desert Bank, too; what was his name? He died, too.

PY: Getting back to banks, was Bank of America helpful in terms of the development of this area? It was the first one in here, right?

KO: Bank of America was, no, it was a typical Bank of America, really.

DO: Was that the first bank, though?

KO: Yes. Coachella was a bank, was a family bank in the little town of Coachella

DO: Then Security came in after.

KO: They came in afterwards, yes. Well, they came in when they bought us out. They weren't here until then. They



bought us out. They bought out the Citizens. We merged Desert Bank merged with Citizens, and then Citizens merged with Security. So that gave them a branch in Indio, Cathedral City and Palm Springs. That was the first Security that was in this area.

DO: That's right.

PY: But that was much later, wasn't it?

KO: No, we hadn't had the bank for a few years, not too many. I don't think four or five years. Yes. We were all running scared. We didn't have enough money, you know. Bank of America is pretty tough competition, too. They're pretty big. They'd make a twenty, twenty-five, thirty thousand dollar loan and we'd have to have a board meeting. Yes. And you didn't have corresponding banks to borrow money from in those days, you know. We were on our own. And the directors were responsible. If we'd go broke, we were responsible. (chuckle) So we were all running pretty scared. We were tickled to death to merge.

PY: But Coachella Valley Savings was doing well.

KO: Real fine, yes. We, in the meantime, have merged with Financial Federation, which is on the New York Stock Exchange and have seventy savings and loan in California.



But we run each as a separate entity, eleven. There's eleven of them and like we're one, we're Coachella and we have three, five stores here, see. Now in San Diego, they have, I think, seven in San Diego under one branch, under one name, yes. Which has helped us, you know, if you need extra money and they're up around three billion dollars, so if you need extra money, well, we can get it from one of the other branches.

PY: Well, why was it that Coachella Valley Savings did so well and Desert Bank was a scary proposition?

KO: Well, in your savings and loan you deal only in first mortgages, see. You loan them a house that's a hundred thousand dollar house and you loan forty, fifty, sixty thousand dollars, but you can't lose anything, see. Your banks, you're loaning on automobiles and mobile homes and land and personal loans and everything. I mean you got a lot of risk and most of them you have a savings and loan. You take a first trust deed on this piece of property, if they can't meet their obligation and pay their payments, you take the house. So it's a lot less risk than savings and loan. No check cashing or all that. Just nonpaying, you know. You don't make any money cashing checks in a bank. All we do is loan



money and escrow, yes, which is a real service to the community. In fact, if it hadn't have been for the savings and loan, we wouldn't have this population explosion. We didn't expect it would be this great, but it made the whole Coachella Valley, really. You go into a bank in those days and want to borrow money to build a house. And if you wanted a twenty or twenty-five, thirty-year loan, then they kind of laughed you out of the place. They don't want to loan the money that long, you know. They make a loan for five or six or seven years, that's a long loan. And your savings and loans are up to thirty years, you know. In fact, that's the only way anybody can afford to build a house. You couldn't pay it off in seven years. I mean most people don't have that kind of income. So the savings and loan has been a great industry for the people. Not only here, but especially in California because it's grown so fast, you know. And we started it, we had an awful lot of, we had problems getting money in, and I'll tell you people were all scared, you know. Even the stockholders. You just can't buck the banks. So it's made it pretty good for us because we were able to buy a lot of stock. (laughter) But we're taking



a chance. We sure took a chance at the time. Yes.

Same with the Desert Bank, same way. We had an awful lot, getting anybody interested in buying any stock, in a old bank just started, you know.

Things looked bad for us; really kind of fun. Yes.

Land values out in the middle of the valley here, you know, you could buy land out there for twenty-five, fifty, seventy-five, a hundred dollars an acre. Land today is selling for thirty, thirty-five, forty thousand dollars. They'd come in and try to buy an automobile and says I want to give you, I want to give me fifty dollars an acre for my ranch, forty acre ranch, two thousand dollars, you know. I want a car. And we took some that way, too.

PY: Really!

KO: Yes. It's kind of interesting the first go around, you know.

PY: Were more people out here interested in trucks and more rugged vehicles?

KO: Now?

PY: No, then.

KO: Yes, they were. They always have been. Yes. Because you have a lot of ranchers, and they use it two purpose,



you know, for everyday work and pleasure, too, you know. Yes. Of course, a lot of recreation vehicles now with the campers on and, which has been real good for the industry and real good for the people, too, you know. Everybody can't afford two cars. A lot of them can, however. Some have two or three or four.

DO: I would say mostly in Palm Desert they can.

KO: Yes, in Palm Desert they can. Yes. Yes. Yes.

PY: Do you ever foresee having a branch of Imperial Motors in Palm Desert area?

KO: I don't think it would be ever possible now. I mean, I don't think they'd allow it. The zoning has never been set up for that, see.

PY: Even in the beginning, it was never set up for that?

KO: In the beginning it could have. In fact, I would have had a branch here if the factory had let me. The factory wouldn't, they wanted one in Indio and one in Palm Springs. I wanted to build one big facility in Palm Springs, in Palm Desert, yes.

DO: That was just seven years ago when you tried to do that.

KO: Yes, it was about seven, about nine years ago.

DO: Nine years?

KO: Nine, ten years ago, yes.



DO: Oh, that was when you opened the one in Cathedral.

KO: No, it was the one while I was building in Indio,  
the other one.

DO: When you were building the one in Indio.

KO: I would have had it on Cook Road, about ten acres on  
Cook Road, out near where the sewer plant is. I had  
land out there, which would have been a real service  
for this area, really. Rancho Mirage, Indian Wells  
and so forth.

PY: And kept your Indio dealership and then along Palm  
Springs.

KO: Yes. But I don't think they'd ever allow it now. No.  
In fact, it wouldn't have been allowed on a hundred and  
eleven then, in those days, you know.

PY: Nineteen years ago?

KO: Nine years ago.

PY: Nine.

KO: Yes. With a dealership you've got body shop work, you  
know, and you got used cars and, you know, it's hard to  
keep the place looking good, you know. Yes. Really  
should be concentrated in an area just for that purpose.  
Yes. Okay?

PY: Anything else? Can you think of anything you haven't  
mentioned?



DO: I can't think of anything else.

KO: I can't think of anything else. I think pretty well covers. This is an interview by this guy. (paper rattling, microphone bumped) This was kind of a . . .

DO: Oh, that was just that picture on there. I thought maybe she might be interested in seeing that.

END OF INTERVIEW